

## **Charlotte County Solid Waste Recycles More Than Ever**

### **By Lorenzo Daetz, Senior Program Coordinator, Solid Waste Division**

Recycling is a major focus for the Charlotte County solid waste division and this effort has had a significant impact on our community. The process has evolved from recycling basic items separated into individual bins to all recyclables being collected in one bin, without separation, in the single stream recycling system.

What does single stream recycling mean? Single stream is a process that allows all recyclable items to be co-mingled together when collected. It eliminates the need to separate the various paper, plastics and other items. The recyclables are taken to an automated facility where they are separated into different plastics, aluminum, paper, glass and other recyclables. The items are then baled and shipped to the purchasers. What used to be thought of as a nice gesture for the environment has now become a major industry that employs thousands nationwide.

A side benefit is that recycling all the items we now put into the single stream significantly increases the life of landfills as more waste is diverted away from the landfill and into the recycling stream. The life span of a landfill is very limited. The costs associated with opening, operating and maintaining a landfill are tremendous. Recycling removes material from the waste stream and increases the life span of a landfill.

The latest information shows that during the last 18 months Charlotte County has increased the recycling percentage of the municipal solid waste stream (MSW) by over 18 percent. This demonstrates the advantage of making it not only easy for residents but demonstrates how far technology has come.

A factor to increasing participation and awareness is the partnering with our county parks, facilities, the schools and many of the major county events by providing recycling support using the friendly bottle-shaped containers. The success rate using this type of container has been tremendous as there is no confusing it with a “trash” receptacle, resulting in contamination-free recyclables. In our county parks alone there are 70 such containers. County schools have 64 containers that are serviced by school clubs and groups.

Local events such as the Florida International Air Show, the Taste of Punta Gorda and the annual Charlotte Harbor Nature Festival are great venues for harvesting recyclables. We have received such a tremendous response that we now get calls requesting that we provide the recycling for many of the smaller local events. The event with the most impact was our first-ever participation in the 2011 Florida International Air Show, where we collected 1600 lbs. of recyclables—a lot of plastic for one event.

The solid waste division already has its sights set on continuing this success by considering education programs for small businesses, to help determine if recycling works towards their advantage financially. There is also the possibility of expanding the residential recycling program with recycling carts with yellow tops to replace the two 18-gallon bins currently used in the county. The carts would be identical to the carts currently in use by our residents with the exception of the yellow top to differentiate between the two. The obvious advantage is that we can almost double the capacity for the homeowner but also provide them with a container that can be closed thereby eliminating wet paper and cardboard and messy floors from seepage.

We continue to be an innovative, proactive and cost-effective division that is focused on serving Charlotte County and we always welcome input from our residents on how we can best meet their needs. Together, as a community, we are well on our way to achieving the Florida Department of Environmental Protections (FDEP) goal of recycling 75 percent of the MSW in Florida by 2020.